

Night and Day Reversal in Newborns

Why do so many newborn infants have night and day reversed?

Many newborns confuse day and night because babies in-utero typically sleep when the mother is moving around during the day and wake up at night when mother rests. When a baby has night and day reversed he or she will not only be awake more at night, but will also do more of everything – eat, poop, fuss and need attention. When finally sleeping the baby will be easily disturbed. Basically your baby is operating as if in the wrong time zone!

How do we know night from day?

We all have light-sensing cells in our retinas that communicate with the part of the brain that controls our circadian rhythm (pineal gland). To take advantage of this make sure your baby is exposed – with eyes open, if possible – to bright light during the day. The more time he or she spends with eyes open the better.

How can I help my baby adjust to a normal night and day pattern?

During the day:

- Your baby will likely wake more frequently if not swaddled. Dress baby appropriately so he or she will not need to be swaddled for warmth.
- Place the baby's bed by a bright window (although not directly in the sun).
- Avoid steady background noise (like music) as this will encourage baby to sleep.
- Avoid activities that put baby to sleep.
- If you take a break during the feed (for example, to burp or to change the diaper) see if baby will have some awake time before needing to finish the feed.

In the evening:

- Gently try to keep baby awake and feed him or her as often as possible.

At night:

- Swaddle baby securely. You can buy blankets specifically for swaddling to make this easier. (Some babies prefer to have hands free.)
- Try to avoid overhead lights.
- Play music or other steady white noise, especially simulated in-utero sounds.
- If the baby typically poops just after falling asleep use generous quantities of a diaper cream to prevent irritation.
- Be prepared for your baby to be hungrier at night. Toward the end of the feed swaddle baby so that he or she will fall asleep ready for bed.
- Make sure baby does not touch anything cool as you put him or her down to sleep.